



# Valley Views

Volume 38, Issue 5

April/May 2020

## Director's Report

By Kristin Alexander, PVAS Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Forgive us if this newsletter is a bit late. As you can imagine we've rewritten the articles several times due to the daily changes in safety guidelines. While the newsletter presents our plans as of printing time, please check the PVAS website and Facebook pages to check on updates, cancellations, additional "virtual" activities, and so on. Like so many other organizations, we've had to cancel all "in person" programs until further notice and have closed the nature center at Cool Spring and the restrooms at Yankauer to prevent further spread of COVID-19.

The good news is that being outside in the natural world is still a safe option as long as you maintain safe space between visitors. We've seen more people on the preserve trails than ever before. The trails at the preserves will remain open as long as possible, and your backyards or other nature spaces are still great places to continue to explore, exercise and learn. Being in nature has been shown to relieve stress – and we can all use that right now.

PVAS is adapting to the "new normal." We pride ourselves on providing experiences and hands-on learning. We're being creative behind the scenes to still do that, but remotely.

Please watch our website calendar and Facebook Page for opportunities to engage with the natural world with the help of PVAS staff and volunteers. There are a few of these already scheduled (but subject to change!) and are described in this issue. And there are lots of resources on our website that we'll be promoting such as a map Wil Hershberger created highlighting birding hotspots in the PVAS service area so you can still get out and enjoy spring migration when you can.

The staff will stay busy working behind the scenes. In addition to the "virtual" programs we'll be offering, conservation and land management projects and planning will continue. There's plenty to do. We'll be monitoring voicemail and e-mails remotely, so please stay in touch.

As you can imagine, race and program cancellations will significantly impact PVAS financially. If you're willing to contribute to help us continue our mission in these unprecedented times, it would help tremendously. Donations can be accepted to PVAS at PO Box 578, Shepherdstown WV 25443 or on our website at <https://www.potomacaudubon.org/annual-appeal/>

We will continue our mission in whatever way circumstances require. There is much to do.

Stay healthy and safe, Kristin

## President's Note: Goin' Solar

By Suzanne Offutt, PVAS President

Recently, my husband and I finally made the plunge to go solar on our home just north of Shepherdstown. With a house that faces due south and only a few old Hackberry trees shading the northwest corner, we were a natural fit for this technology. We worked with Milestone Solar after a referral from PVAS for which Bill Anderson, the owner, made a contribution to PVAS. We could take advantage of the 26% tax credit and couldn't be happier with our choice. We are now the proud owners of 39 Panasonic panels with an estimated minimum production of 78% of our power needs in a year. The most thrilling moment was watching the electric meter reverse and begin to spin backwards on one of our recent glorious, sunny days. But saving money and watching spinning meters weren't the only reasons that we made this choice. This is a good choice for the environment and for public health.

West Virginia is the only state in the nation to have no initiatives toward renewable energy resources to replace that provided by coal-fired power plants. We, along with other states in the coal-producing region of the mid-Appalachian mountains, face barriers including restrictive state and utility policies, politicians' ties to fossil fuel industries, monopoly utilities' resistance to change, lack of public awareness, and many more. However, neighboring Maryland is making significant progress in implementing renewable energy resources.

The federal ITC program offers a 26% tax credit per household on the cost of a solar installation in 2020, but the program will phase out by 2025. The Maryland solar rebate program supplements this federal tax credit by paying a homeowner \$1,000 to install a system smaller than 20 kilowatts, located at your primary residence and installed by a NABCEP certified installer. Maryland also has net metering policies which provide full credit on a homeowner's electric bill for the extra electricity that your solar panels generate. During times that a system generates more power than it uses, the homeowner can "bank" it with the utility to draw from it later when more power is needed. West Virginia doesn't have any of these state incentives, and no commitment to reducing our carbon footprint, which would be a significant contributor to improving air quality, water quality, climate change, and the health of anything that breathes.

When coal is burned it releases a number of airborne toxins and pollutants. They include mercury, lead, sulfur dioxide,

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*Potomac Valley Audubon Society is dedicated to preserving, restoring, and enjoying the natural world through education and action.*

*President's Note continued from previous page*

nitrogen oxides, particulates, and various other heavy metals. Health impacts can range from asthma and breathing difficulties to brain damage, heart problems, cancer, neurological disorders, and premature death. Lakes, rivers, streams, and drinking water supplies are all heavily impacted by coal mines and power plants. Coal-fired power plants produce more than 100 million tons of coal ash every year. More than half of that waste ends up in ponds, lakes, landfills, and other sites where, over time, it can contaminate waterways and drinking water supplies. Other water impacts include acid rock drainage from coal mines, the obliteration of mountain streams and valleys by mountaintop removal mining, and the energy-water collisions that occur when coal plants rely too heavily on local water supplies. Climate change is coal's most serious, long-term global impact. Consequences of global warming include drought, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather, and species loss. The severity of those impacts is tied directly to the amount of carbon dioxide we release, including from coal plants. In the United States, coal accounts for roughly one quarter of all energy-related carbon emissions.

To combat carbon emissions, consider installing solar panels on your own residence and support state and national clean energy policies that could include the following:

1. Establish net metering laws which allow those with solar panels to sell any excess power back to the grid.
2. Allow or clarify access to power purchase agreements which allow solar developers to buy solar arrays for customers and sell power to them at a lower rate than their prior electric bill while the customer makes payments on the panels.
3. Expand utility energy efficiency programs which can require utilities to offer energy efficiency initiatives.
4. Expand Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) programs which allow residential and commercial property owners to finance energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements. Participants can repay qualified energy improvements over time through a voluntary property tax assessment collected by local governments, so the debt is associated with the property rather than an individual.

In celebration of the Sun and Solar Power!

## Where's the Month-at-a-Glance?

As you'll notice throughout this edition of Valley Views, concerns surrounding COVID-19 are throwing our upcoming events for a loop. Like so many other organizations, we are making every effort possible to contain the spread of this novel coronavirus, and have decided to cancel our programs at least through April 15th. Post-April 15th, we will be monitoring local, state, and federal recommendations and making decisions accordingly. In the face of this uncertainty - and in our efforts to reduce paper waste - we have decided not to include an April and May Month-at-a-Glance in this issue. Please keep an eye on our website calendar and Facebook page to stay updated on our activities. You can also give us a call at 681-252-1387 with any questions - we'll be monitoring the Cool Spring office voicemail remotely during this time. With any luck, a June and July Month-at-a-Glance is right around the corner!

## Volunteer Spotlight

### Have you met Anthony (Tony) Maciorowski?

Have you met Anthony (Tony) Maciorowski? Tony is one of our go to volunteers for many of our 4<sup>th</sup> grade watershed field trips. Tony spent most of his career as an aquatic ecologist, so of course he is our macroinvertebrate and aquatic life guru. He helps lead our benthic macroinvertebrate station where students use nets to search for macroinvertebrates in the stream. Tony is right there in the water with the students, showing them techniques for catching critters. After volunteering for a field trip, Tony once said to us, "I can't think of a better way to spend my time than volunteering with the PVAS watershed program...it is meaningful, satisfying and fun. Most importantly I believe it plants the seeds of environmental awareness in young people..." Tony truly is an asset to our watershed team. If you get a chance to meet Tony (once we are no longer social distancing), be sure to thank him for all that he contributes to our youth education programs.

All of our PVAS volunteers are great! If you know someone who deserves a shout out, please contact Kristin at [Kristin@PotomacAudubon.org](mailto:Kristin@PotomacAudubon.org).



## Spring – The Season of Nature's Song

By Wil Hershberger, Nature Images and Sounds, LLC

After winter's long silence, March and April open the door to the rebirth of nature's song. The progression is subtle at first – Wood Frogs cackling from the edges of mostly frozen ponds, Spring Peepers screeching from ponds and marshes (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/539359>), Red-winged Blackbirds singing and calling in the local marsh, White-breasted Nuthatches becoming more vocal as pairs interact at the approach of the mating season, Carolina Wren pairs duetting in the thicket down the road (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/539628>), and woodpeckers of many species drumming and calling as they start a new nesting season. The progression crescendos with the appearance of the migrants as they return from the southern sojourns – warblers and flycatchers, orioles and vireos, all singing and proclaiming that they have returned, a new season of song has begun (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/127085>).

The songs of birds are different from their calls. Songs are typically only sung by males (there are exceptions), songs are typically longer and more complex than calls, and they function to attract a mate and defend a territory. Calls generally are shorter, simpler, and used for many other functions such as broadcasting danger, staying in contact with mates or flock members while staying under the radar of predators, begging for food, announcing that food has been found, etc. Within the songbirds (chickadees, titmice, finches, blackbirds, grosbeaks, etc.), songs are typically learned from other males of the same species. However, songs are innate in the non-songbirds (flycatchers, swallows, doves, woodpeckers, owls, etc.). In contrast, calls are apparently innate in all birds, used by nestlings in their communications with their parents and siblings, and even given by birds raised in isolation.

Non-vocal sounds can also act as a song, such as the drumming of a woodpecker on a hollow branch, (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/107289>), the twittering of the wing feathers of an American Woodcock (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/100723>), and the winnowing of the tail feathers of Wilson's Snipe (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/94350>). The Club-winged Manakin has given up his vocal song for an incredible stridulatory display that is unique in the world of birds (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSHjhCN-6NC0>). These non-vocal sounds are used similarly to the vocal songs of other birds to woo a mate and, in some species, declare and defend a territory.



Red-winged Blackbird, displaying © Wil Hershberger, Nature Images and Sounds, LLC

As alluded to above, females can also sing in some songbird species. Her songs are reminiscent of those of the male of the species though typically not as long, varied, or richly musical. These include, but are not limited to; Northern Cardinal – females can sing nearly as well as the male of the species. She reserves her songs for helping the male defend their territory from intruders (real or perceived) (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/534557>). Rose-breasted Grosbeak – the female's song is rich and warbling, similar to the male's song, but not as complex. It is given during nest building and when taking over the nest from the male. Female Black-headed Grosbeaks, of the western US, also sing during incubation of their eggs and especially when the young leave the nest. Her songs are not as rich and varied as those of the male (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/164654>). Song Sparrow females can also produce simple songs, especially when defending the nesting territory from an intruding female.

The singing behavior of male songbirds (those that learn to sing from other males of the species) has been the subject of a great deal of scientific study since the early 20th century. It appears that male songbirds learn to sing their songs just as we learn to speak. We listen to and mimic a tutor progressing through a series of stages; babbling, scattered words, fractured sentences, and finally culminating in a normal, "crystalized" song. The preferences of the female of the species seems to drive the evolution of song. This appears to lead to more, varied song patterns and greater complexity within the songs themselves. Since this learning is localized with many species of songbirds returning to the same region from which they were born, local dialects can, and often do, develop. Examples are Northern Cardinals in Texas versus the same species here in eastern WV. The songs are similar, but there are enough differences to make identifying a bird difficult for an out-of-towner. (Maryland <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/107306>; Texas <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/130905>)

As spring progresses, I hope that you will get outside and listen to the splendid songs of our native amphibians and birds and experience the crescendo as spring unfolds the songs of nature.



Warbling vireo © Wil Hershberger, Nature Images and Sounds, LLC



## PVAS Events

### PVAS's Ruth Ann Dean Memorial Birdathon:

#### *Birding at the Preserves and Birdathon's Big Day*

This May, the Potomac Valley Audubon Society is celebrating its 11<sup>th</sup> annual Ruth Ann Dean Memorial Birdathon. We are honoring Ruth Ann, who was a founding member and ardent supporter of PVAS, through an exciting array of birding experiences. We hope to capture the spring migration and highlight our feathered friend's northward journey to their breeding grounds.

As the birds make their way along the Atlantic flyway, we will be eagerly awaiting them as they stop to rest, recoup and if we are lucky, nest at our nature preserves. Join us for the first portion of the Ruth Ann Dean Memorial Birdathon at one or all of our 'Birding at the Preserves' celebrations. These events are free and open to people of all birding levels and physical abilities. Our expert birders will be at Cool Spring Preserve on May 9<sup>th</sup>, Yankauer Nature Preserve on May 16<sup>th</sup> and at Stauffer's Marsh on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. The experts are excited to meet you and help you either begin birding or refine your skills. Information is available for each event at <https://www.potomacaudubon.org/calendar/category/bird-events/>.

The second portion of PVAS's Ruth Ann Dean Memorial Birdathon will be an exciting Big Day competition. For this, teams of birders will compete to see who can count the most species of birds in a single, 24-hour period anywhere in our 4-county service area. Between May 10 – 23, each team will evaluate the weather conditions and pick what they think will be the ideal birding day to complete the Big Day. This event offers the opportunity for anyone to sponsor a Pro Team led by a local birding legend or compete against a Pro Team for a chance to earn eternal birding glory.

The three Pro Teams are the **Venerable Vespers** led by Wil Hershberger, the **Sentient Shrikes** led by Bob Dean and the **Gallant Goshawks** led by Matt Orzie. By sponsoring a Pro Team, you are supporting the efforts of that team and earning that team certain advantages.

So, if a Pro Team raises X amount, they earn the following:

- \$100 – use of binoculars
- \$200 – binoculars and an assistant birder
- \$300 – binoculars, assistant birder, and the ability to count birds heard but not seen
- \$400 – binoculars, assistant birder, ability to count birds heard but not seen, and use of a spotting scope
- \$500 – binoculars, assistant birder, ability to count birds heard but not seen, a spotting scope, and the use of audio lures.

Links to sponsor the Pro Teams can be found at <https://www.potomacaudubon.org/birding/ruth-ann-dean-memorial-birdathon/>

Interested birders are also encouraged to form and register their own teams to either compete against the Pro Teams (who will be mobile birding for 24-hours) or participate in a Big Sit (bird in one location for 24-hours). Awards will be given to winning teams in each category during the Annual Picnic at the end of May. Teams competing against the Pro Teams automatically have all of the birding privileges, listed above, available to them.

All funds raised from Birdathon events will support PVAS's Habitat Stewardship Programs ([Grassland Birds Initiative](#), [Protected Pollinator Patch](#) and [Wildlife Habitat](#)), which seek to educate landowners on the best management practices for sustaining habitat for our native wildlife species on their own properties.

Please contact Krista Hawley ([adultprograms@potomacaudubon.org](mailto:adultprograms@potomacaudubon.org)) or KC Walters ([katelyn@potomacaudubon.org](mailto:katelyn@potomacaudubon.org)) or call our main office at 681-252-1387 with any questions you may have.

### Venerable Vespers

The Venerable Vespers are led by the legendary, Wil Hershberger! Wil began birding at age 12 and has nearly 50 years of birding experience. He enjoys sharing the sport of birding and has taught beginner birders for more than 30 years through Birding 101. Rather than keeping a life list of birds, he focuses on recording bird songs and vocalizations. He has archived over 3,200 recordings of birds, bugs and other creatures at Cornell's Macaulay Library. Wil has quite a remarkable ear and can tell you if a bird is feeling under the weather! Wil is also an expert behind the lens of a camera and captures breath-taking photographs of birds in their wild habitats. One of Wil's favorite birds is the Vesper Sparrow and he is passionate about conserving grasslands to increase the nesting success of this species. Sponsor the Venerable Vespers!



## PVAS Events

## Sentient Shrikes

The Sentient Shrikes are led by seldom seen but always revered, Bob Dean! Bob was launched into birding at age 5 when his dad showed him a screech owl perched on their home. Bob reveled in the joys of watching the owl hunt sparrows. Since then, Bob has been thrilled by some 266 species of birds in WV and about 600 throughout the US. He believes all young people should be treated to wonderful experiences in the wild places where birds are found and has shared his passion for birding by educating beginner birders for several decades. Bob is also an experienced bird bander and says "[his] biggest thrill has been attaching uniquely numbered ankle bracelets to over 10,000 of his feathered friends." Sponsor the Sentient Shrikes!



## Gallant Goshawks

The Gallant Goshawks are led by the one and only, Matt Orsie! Matt started birding at the ripe, young age of 45. He was a student of Birding 101 in 2001 and later went on to co-teach the course for 9 years. He also served on the West Virginia bird records committee for 9 years. He has birded all over North America in the last 20 years and says favorite area to go is southeastern-Arizona. Matt's life list includes 303 species in West Virginia and 775 species in all of North America. He loves to assist others with birding and share his passion. He is also a renowned photographer, capturing remarkable photos of birds, butterflies, wildlife, landscapes and astronomy. Support the Gallant Goshawks!



## "This Race is for the Birds!"

The 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our annual race was off to a beautiful start; preparations were being made, our community showed amazing support, sponsors were more than generous and eager to be part of this family friendly event, the trails were perfectly mowed and we had created a fantastic 10K single-loop. We were eagerly looking forward to March 28, with no idea of what was to come...

While cancelling the actual race was unavoidable, the excitement and energy of our would-be participants was captured in a creative 'Virtual Race' Facebook Group. We had to give up the in person race at Broomgrass, but made 'lemonade out of lemons' by sharing in each others solitary accomplishments though photos of participants running, walking, hiking and even playing Frisbee golf! Anyone who posted photos on the Virtual Race has been entered in the drawing to win the original race awards. Race t-shirts will be available for pick up at a variety of venues once it is safe to be out and about again.

Our 2020 sponsors have been extremely generous and we would like to send each and every one of them a sincere thank you. All of the sponsorship and registrant funds go directly toward supporting PVAS's programs and the upkeep of our four preserves. 'This Race is for the Birds!' 2020 sponsors included:

*Platinum Sponsorship:* Broomgrass and Farmer Tim of Steel House Farm, John Bachner & Patty Bain Bachner, friends of Deb Paththoff, Friends of Mark Benedict, Spirit of Jefferson

*Gold Sponsorship:* Bavarian Brothers Brewing, Thank you to the staff of Hospice of the Panhandle

*Silver Sponsorship:* Audiology Inc., Chick-fil-A (Martinsburg, WV) Community Garden Market, Glory Days Grill (Ranson/Charles Town, WV) The Journal, Michael P. Sullivan, LLC, The Observer Progressive Printing, The Shepherdstown Chronicle, Tara Sanders Lowe – 4 State Real Estate, Tress 101, Two Rivers Treads

*Bronze Sponsorship:* AC&T, Charm City Run, Dickinson & Wait Craft Gallery, domestic, Good Vibes Sound Healing, Grapes & Grains Gourmet, Greentree Realty, Grove & Dall'Olio Architects, Hoplite-Outfitters, Jefferson Security Bank, Martin's Foods, Potomac-Mecklenburg Garden Club, Reid's Distributor, Schmitt Construction Co., Virginia Lodge No. 1 Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Weis Markets.

Stay well, stay active and we look forward to seeing you all on the trails in the near future!



## PVAS Events

**Adult Programs**

*By Krista Hawley, Adult Programs Coordinator*

Spring 2020 has become a time of uncertainty, uneasiness, flexibility, disappointments, coming together, support, and community. When this is over, each person will have a very personal story to tell. What will we learn from this? How will we as individuals, an organization, and community grow from this time? Will one of the outcomes be a greater focus on community building and the environment? At PVAS, our hope is to be able to look beyond this unprecedented time towards a future where we as a community and environment can emerge even healthier and more engaged than before. We hope here at PVAS we can help shed some light on your 'shelter in place' days and the days ahead.

While many of our spring programs have been rescheduled and cancelled, there are many opportunities available to keep you engaged and active. Community Science, done from your own yard, can continue to provide valuable information for future research and policy. Visit The Cornell Lab's Citizen Science page for an exciting array of possibilities: [www.birds.cornell.edu/citizenscience](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/citizenscience).

Read through their list and choose a project that best suits your interest. One that peaked my interest was 'Celebrate Urban Birds/ Finding Peace During Stressful Times.' The 'Project Feeder Watch' option offers 'More To Explore' links which are sure to keep your spirits up through their Feeder Watch Cams, help you ID those tricky birds, as well as identifying the common birds you might find at your feeder:

**Celebrate Urban Birds:** Get involved with birds and community activities in urban and suburban areas.

**eBird:** Track and share your sightings anywhere, any time.

**NestWatch:** Find and monitor bird nests.

**Project FeederWatch:** Watch and record birds at your feeders in winter.

The fight against the coronavirus is definitely very sobering and we at PVAS are taking it seriously. As we follow the guidelines to stay at home, we are making the commitment to you all that once we emerge from this, we will strive to provide quality programs and interactive educational opportunities. Please continue to communicate with us: let us know what you are up to, what you see in your yard, and what programs you'd like to see on our calendar post-virus!

Visiting the PVAS Events Calendar at [www.potomacaudubon.org/calendar/](http://www.potomacaudubon.org/calendar/) is the best way to stay abreast of our rescheduled and cancelled programs, as well as participating in fun virtual events we are working on.

Stay well!

**WE NEED YOUR VOTE!**

It's your favorite issue of the year when you, as a member of PVAS, get to cast your vote! There are three items on the enclosed ballot:

1. The incoming Board of Directors, whose terms will begin July 1, 2020.
2. Adoption of the revised "Organization and Structure of Potomac Valley Audubon Society." The organization has changed so much in recent years that it was time to make some significant updates to this document. The increase in staff has caused a change in roles and responsibilities of Board Members and Committee Structures. This document has been revised to reflect these changes.
3. Approval of revisions of the Bylaws: Changes in the Bylaws were necessary to reflect the changes in the "Organization and Structure of PVAS" document mentioned above. This vote will adopt those updates as well as other updates.

The Board Biographies, "Organization and Structure" document and the Bylaws are all available on our webpage for your review at <https://www.potomacaudubon.org/about/gov/>.

You may use the enclosed ballot and mail it in, or you may cast your vote electronically at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/C2PZ75J>

If you are unable to access the website to review these documents, we can mail you a hard copy upon request sent to [Kristin@PotomacAudubon.org](mailto:Kristin@PotomacAudubon.org), or by calling the office: 681-252-1387.



## Family and Youth Programs

### Immersing in Nature While Socially Distancing

By Amy Moore, Lead Teacher & Naturalist

With the current recommendation to practice social distancing, we know that it is a challenge to keep children busy and engaged in learning. Although PVAS will not be offering any in-person youth programs until it is once again advisable to do so, we will be offering families multiple nature immersion alternatives:

**Cool Spring Story Walks:** Through the rest of April, when safety precautions allow, PVAS will be posting weekly a new Story-Walk set up along the trails of Cool Spring Preserve. A Story Walk consists of each page of a story posted on individual signs that are spread along a walking path. In order to read the story, you have to walk from page to page. StoryWalks are a wonderful way to exercise, spend time outside, and read all at the same time.



**Storytime with the Turtles:** Every Wednesday during the month of April, PVAS education staff will be hosting a virtual story time and turtle feeding of the turtles that live at Cool Spring Preserve's nature center. Storytime with the Turtles will be broadcasted using Facebook Live, which can be accessed on the PVAS Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/PotomacValleyAudubon/](http://www.facebook.com/PotomacValleyAudubon/)) every Wednesday at 10:00 a.m.

**Virtual Spring Peeper Hike:** Join me on a virtual Cool Spring Preserve Spring Peeper Hike via Facebook Live on Friday, April 3 at 6:30 p.m. I'll virtually take you into Cool Spring's marsh to hunt for Spring Peepers, listen to their loud



peeps, and learn about the natural history of these small yet noisy amphibians.

**Cool Spring Preserve Scavenger Hunt:** Download and print a Cool Spring Preserve scavenger hunt sheet from our "Families" page in the Education section of our website ([www.potomacaudubon.org/education/parent-resources/](http://www.potomacaudubon.org/education/parent-resources/)) and then hit the trails and see how many nature items you can find.

**Virtual Nature Lessons:** Check our Facebook page and website for weekly virtual nature lesson videos. Upcoming lessons are: Spring Wildflower Walk, Gardening, Wild Edible Plants, Habitats at Cool Spring Preserve, and Backyard Birding.

**Youth Nature Photography Contest:** Does your child have an interest in spending time outdoors and taking photos of nature? Encourage them to enter our youth nature photography contest and capture the beginnings of Spring. Winning photographs will be featured in the June/July edition of *Valley Views*. Ages 18 and younger may enter. Simply email a photo entry to Laurel at [Laurel@PotomacAudubon.org](mailto:Laurel@PotomacAudubon.org) and let us know your child's full name and age. Submission deadline is April 30.

**Youth Nature Poetry Contest:** We are also looking for a budding nature poet to feature in the June/July edition of *Valley Views*. The subject of the poem should be a nature experience at your child's favorite PVAS preserve. Poems of any style and length are welcome. If you're looking for inspiration, check out the structures of haiku, acrostic, limerick, and cinquain poems. Include your child's full name and age in your submission. Ages 18 and younger may enter. Submit a poem entry to Griffin at [Griffin@PotomacAudubon.org](mailto:Griffin@PotomacAudubon.org).

### 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Watershed Program: A Student's Perspective

By Amy Moore, Lead Teacher & Naturalist

For the first time ever this school year, we are able to provide our 4<sup>th</sup> grade watershed program to EVERY student in Berkeley County! We are also providing the program at seven of the nine Jefferson County schools with 4<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. (Some of the lessons this spring are being offered "virtually" due to the early school closings.) In the 2020/2021 school year, we believe that we will have enough funding to provide the program to every student in both counties; this will be made possible with support from Berkeley County Public Service District, the City of Martinsburg's Stormwater Program, West Virginia Rivers Coalition, and the WV DEP.

Throughout the program, students learn about their watershed, where their water comes from, sources of water pollution, how to protect water sources, how to test for water quality, and how to study the aquatic life found in our local streams. For most schools, the program consists of five in-class lessons and a field trip. A few schools - such as Tomahawk Intermediate School in Berkeley County - choose the yearlong version of the watershed program, which consists of nine in-class lessons and a field trip. Laurel Schwartz, our AmeriCorps Environmental Educator, is the watershed instructor at Tomahawk. She has been visiting the school's seven 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes since November. She asked one student - Bryan - to share his experience with the program so far. Bryan is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student

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## Family and Youth Programs

*4th Grade Watershed continued from previous page*

in Ms. Irwin's class at Tomahawk Intermediate School. This is what he had to say:

"Something I learned in watershed was the last step of the water cycle." Here he is referring to run-off and infiltration. We focus a lot on how pollutants such as motor oil, fertilizer, pesticide, and soil can get carried into our local streams through run-off. We also teach students that when water infiltrates into the soil, tree roots can help filter pollutants while also helping to hold soil in place. Bryan went on to say, "Another thing that was fun and interesting was when we looked at the pH of different liquids." Here he is referring to the water quality lesson where students learned the ideal pH range of a stream. The students take the pH of different liquids such as vinegar, milk, tap water, and Coke. On their field trip they will take the pH of a stream. "I also liked it when we looked at macroinvertebrates. Those were really cool." In another lesson of the program, we teach students that benthic macroinvertebrates (stream bottom-dwelling insects) act as indicators of water quality, as some species are very sensitive to water pollution.

We find that many students leave our watershed program understanding their connection to nature and their watershed, and for some, an appreciation for the natural world that they didn't have before.



## Camp Programs

### Audubon Discovery Camp: Summer 2020

*By Erin Shaw, Program Administrator*

During this time of uncertainty regarding COVID-19, there is nothing more important to us than the care, health, and safety of the campers and staff at Audubon Discovery Camp. Although the start of camp is still two months away, our planning continues full steam ahead. We are eagerly looking forward to providing children with a safe and fun-filled summer where time in nature is spent in a meaningful way.

We have always prided ourselves on timely and transparent communication with our community, and you will certainly be hearing more from us in the weeks leading up to camp with relevant updates on the evolving situation related to coronavirus. Be assured that we will base all decisions on the advice of our medical community as well as local, state, and federal government agencies' recommendations.

We would like to share the steps we are considering to keep campers safe and healthy:

- Limiting group sizes to no more than 8 campers
- Avoiding games and activities that involve physical contact
- Sanitizing camp equipment, and bathrooms, at regular intervals throughout the day
- Sanitizing tables after each use
- Encouraging campers to wash their hands frequently throughout the day



At this point in time, we are not cancelling or postponing any camp sessions, but please understand that circumstances may cause us to do so in the coming months. If we cancel a camp session, 100% of registration fees will be refunded. We have a host of new camp themes to engage your camper this summer, ranging from "Animal Olympics" to "Forces of Nature." So turn your mind toward summer and see what we have planned at this link: [www.potomacaudubon.org/education/youth/discovercamp/](http://www.potomacaudubon.org/education/youth/discovercamp/).

We do understand that it is difficult to plan your summer with so many uncertainties, so we've also made some changes to our cancellation policy. Our updated cancellation policy is as follows:

For all cancellations NOT made by Potomac Valley Audubon Society, our non-refundable registration fee has been dropped from \$50 to \$25. In addition, you may now cancel up to one week before the start of a camp session to receive your full refund (minus the non-refundable \$25 registration fee) - this had previously been set at two weeks.

Thank you for your trust in Potomac Valley Audubon Society's Audubon Discovery Camps. We will continue to keep you updated as new information becomes available. Please feel free to reach out with any additional questions or concerns by contacting our Camp Director, Amy Moore, at [Amy@PotomacAudubon.org](mailto:Amy@PotomacAudubon.org).



## Notes from the Preserves

## In the Preserves

By KC Walters, Land & Conservation Manager

Happy Spring! As the days become warmer and longer, activity at the preserves increases, and not just the visitors. You'll find bees buzzing, birds chirping, critters scurrying, and the land manager bustling about!

Despite the recent challenges we face due to COVID-19, the beginning of 2020 has been very busy and exciting in the preserves. In early February, the nature center at Cool Spring received a fresh coat of paint. Thanks to funding from the Eastern Area Health Education Center, Freedom's Run Community Grant, we were able to hire Bracken's Painting to revitalize the entire interior. The nature center now feels bright, fresh, and inviting. We encourage everyone to come check it out once we re-open.

The Nature Playspace at Cool Spring Preserve has a new play element, a HUGE hollow log. A large sycamore tree fell into a farm field just down the road from Cool Spring two years ago. Gary Sylvester led the charge to bring the hollowed out base of that tree to the Playspace. With the help of Peter Palmer, Kevin Moore, Tom Corley, our Lead Teacher & Naturalist Amy, myself, a skid steer, and a tractor, the hollow log was loaded onto a trailer and delivered to its new location. It is hard to put into words just how big and amazing this hollow log is, and the kids absolutely love it.

The pollinator garden at Yankauer is expanding. All of the pollinator-friendly species initially planted in the garden are beginning to seed out into the entire mulched space. The perimeter of the garden was recently lined by rocks harvested from the preserve by volunteers during a frigid February volunteer workday. Be on the lookout for lots of beautiful, native flowers in the pollinator garden this spring.

The Stauffer's Marsh viewing platform is complete and has passed county inspection. Boy Scout, Jimmy Humen, received his Eagle Scout badge as a result of the completion of this project. We are excited to utilize this platform for bird walks, school field trips, and other PVAS programs.

Early this spring, a local resident and licensed tree climber with a love for Eidolon worked to clear the viewshed from the stone cottage. Historically, the cottage had sweeping views of the mountains, valleys, and Potomac River. Our goal was to reclaim some of this historic view, as it is culturally significant to the story of Eidolon. It is definitely worth the drive to sit in the rocking chair on the front porch and enjoy the view the Zapoleon's loved so much.



Hopefully, volunteer workdays at the preserves will resume this month – keep your eye on the website calendar for updates. We will have trail clearing days at Stauffer's Marsh and Cool Spring Preserve during the month of April, and in May we will be working at Eidolon and Yankauer. We are tentatively planning a special volunteer workday on the first weekend in May to pot trees and shrubs for this fall's Native Plant Sale.

If you want to volunteer, but can't make it to the scheduled volunteer workdays, we have a new program just for you! On May 19, I'll be holding the first PVAS Weed Warrior Certification training. Certified Weed Warriors will be given the knowledge and the tools needed to tackle invasive species at the preserves on their own schedules. Plus, they will

be connected with other Weed Warriors to work together. Be sure to register at the following for this training; space (and awesome t-shirts) are limited: [www.potomacaudubon.org/event/weedwarriortraining/](http://www.potomacaudubon.org/event/weedwarriortraining/). Please note – like all our events and programs right now – this training may be postponed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



## Conservation

## Top 5 Local Spots for Spring Wildflowers

By Kathy Bilton

For links and more details on the locations listed below, see <http://botsoc.org/top5.html>.

**1. Ferry Hill:** It's hard to believe when one walks this trail in the winter that in a short time, it will soon be filled with blooms of a wide variety of wildflowers. You can enter the trail from the path that parallels the C&O Canal towpath just upstream from the bridge across the Potomac at Shepherdstown. Alternatively, you can park above the towpath near the Ferry Hill Plantation house and enter the trail from behind the house. *Ferry Hill Plantation Visitor Center is located at 16500 Shepherdstown Pike, Sharpsburg, MD.*



**2. Yankauer Nature Preserve:** The original of the four PVAS nature preserves, Yankauer is a perfect place to see Twinleaf, along with an array of other wildflowers. While you can see plenty of Dutchman's Breeches at Yankauer, none of the very similar Squirrel Corn has been found there.

*Yankauer is located at 438 Whittings Neck Rd, Martinsburg, WV. Please note that the bathrooms at Yankauer are closed until further notice to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.*

**3. Shannondale Springs Wildlife Management Area:** A wonderful display of spring flowers can be seen here along a trail close to the Shenandoah River. If you want a longer walk, have a look at the map to see how you can do a circuit hike. *Shannondale Springs WMA is located near Co Rte 9/5, Harpers Ferry, WV. A map can be found at this link: [www.wvdnr.gov/wmamaproj/pdf/pdf300/ShannondaleSpringsFinal11x17\\_300dpi.pdf](http://www.wvdnr.gov/wmamaproj/pdf/pdf300/ShannondaleSpringsFinal11x17_300dpi.pdf).*

**4. Blandy Experimental Farm:** On its 712 acres, Blandy Experimental Farm operates as an ecological field station and includes the State Arboretum of Virginia, a fine native plant garden, an herb garden, and other treasures. It's about 45 minutes from Shepherdstown and quite a treat to visit. *Blandy is located at 400 Blandy Farm Ln, Boyce, VA.*



**5. Thompson's Wildlife Management Area:** It's nice to walk through the rich cove forest at Thompson's at any time of year, but in the first week in May, it's particularly special when the billions of trillium are in bloom. It is about 30 minutes beyond Blandy Experimental Farm. *Thompson's WMA is located at 3294 Leeds Manor Rd, Markham, VA.*

*Photos, clockwise from top right, Wildflowers on Ferry Hill © Charlotte Fremaux; Trillium, Trout lily, and Twinleaf © Kathy Bilton*

## Nature Notes

*By Griffin Bosserman, AmeriCorps Environmental Educator*

It's no secret to those that know me: I love condors. My friends, family, and co-workers get inundated with facts and robust statements about these follically challenged beauties...and I'm not sorry! Funny enough, I haven't always loved these birds, or even known what sets them apart from our eastern buzzards. That all changed on a college trip to California, the land of the condor. I heard previously about the allure of the Golden State's native scavenger, but it wasn't until I saw the gliding gargantuan that I was hooked. The California condor creates an optical illusion; although condors can appear to match size with their carrion-eating cousin the turkey vulture, in reality, the condor's wingspan is twice as large. Another way to tell the two apart is by flight pattern; while vultures soar sideways as a result of wind, the condor remains perfectly horizontal due to its strength and size. My fascination with these birds resulted in the poem I wrote in the last edition of Valley Views, as well as my license plate ('G Condor'), a burning desire to live a life of stewardship, and the namesake of my future parish: Condor Community Church. Long story short, these birds - who know not of my existence - have taken over mine.

There are all sorts of notable and neat condor claims, and this piece is going to dive into some of those. Condors are very family-oriented animals. They remember their nest, parents, and how to get home. Nesting in rocky mountain openings and outcroppings, mother condors lay their eggs in less than accessible places, yet the hatchlings never forget their elevated introduction to Earth. Studies show that California condors return home on occasion, flying over 1,000 miles at times. Now I know I like visiting my mom in Pennsylvania and my dad in Florida, but unless you count putting the pedal to the metal, I'm not getting there under my own force like the condor does.

Loyalty must be a California condor's middle name, because not only do they remember their parents, these creature Casanovas also mate for life. Taking this sweet notion a step further, the relationship dynamics of male/female condor couples somewhat resemble that of humans. I've heard stories of an angered female condor giving her mate the what for upon his return from a trip away from the misses. These birds mirror their anthropocentric neighbors in terms of spite, spit, and spirited debate - all in the name of love. The notion of a condor's loyalty has been essential to the reintroduction of this species to its native peaks. The programs responsible for the survival of the species - such as the Ventana Wildlife Society in Marin County, CA - take advantage of condor pairs' longevity. By observing the unique habits of their permanent older residents' relationship dynamics, biologists are able to foster an ideal situation to promote healthy breeding and new chicks. Once the chicks are hatched, they are closely monitored and then slowly released into the wild. Despite these birds being on their own once they reach maturity, as mentioned, their strong familial ties will send them home from time to time. This allows conservation biologists to check on the newest generation of birds without disturbing their natural development and exploration.

Speaking of these family reunions, my condor - Nomad - is notorious for making such journeys. Symbolically adopted for me via the Ventana Wildlife Society, Nomad the condor was named due to his long journeys as a result of being a "mama's boy." It is recorded that Nomad makes an annual trip from the canyons of Utah to the nest in Central California where he was hatched. Alluding back to my poem in the last edition of Valley Views, it's good to take a page out of the condor's book and spread your wings and fly, but remember where you came from!

Although these birds live on the other side of our continent, it's important to learn from these animals and their story. The California condor was nearly extinct, with only a few dozen remaining in the 1970's. The species was declared endangered in 1967, mainly as a result of lead poisoning. The main way the lead poisoning occurred was due to hunted quarry being left to rot. When the animals are left behind, the scavenging condors will consume the carcass and in turn eat the remaining lead bullets. To combat the declining population, a captive breeding program began in the early 1980's. The program mirrored that of the successful bald eagle initiative, and today there are more than 500 California condors, 300 of which live in the wild. With the majority of condors still being hatched in captivity, there is room to improve, but the future of our pink-headed friend is looking bright. In closing of this introduction to the mysterious condor, remember, in a world full of buzzards - be a condor!





## Conservation

### Backyards – Important Habitat for Wildlife

*By Wil Hersherberger, Natue Images and Sounds, LLC*

Natural habitats are being fragmented and lost at an ever-increasing rate, stressing the ability of birds and other wildlife to find food, cover, nesting sites, and water. Vast areas are becoming devoid of native plants, replaced by non-native ornamentals, as human communities push farther and farther away from city centers. Research has shown that our native insects do not eat most of these non-native plants. Without insects, there are no birds. This loss of habitat, the loss of native plants, and the over-use of pesticides have all conspired to the point that, since 1970, we have lost nearly 3 BILLION birds that once called North America home.

In order to preserve and sustain birds and other wildlife, it has become imperative for backyards to become extensions of the once native habitats they've replaced. New developments should be planted with area-appropriate native vegetation, existing yards should be assessed, and non-native plants replaced with natives. Pesticides should never be used. The hope is to have a burgeoning population of native insects eating the native vegetation and thus feeding the birds and other wildlife that once called these areas home. Native plants such as trees and shrubs, as well as establishing native wildflower meadows, will benefit our native pollinators and, by extension, our native birds. A chewed up native plant is a successful plant. We'll have to get past the knee-jerk reaction of applying pesticides at the first sign of our plants

being chewed to pieces – the more plants that are being eaten by insects, the better. The goal is not to have an array of pristine, uneaten plants.

The Potomac Valley Audubon Society has several new Habitat Stewardship Programs. From the Grassland Birds Initiative for large parcels of land, to the backyard centric Wildlife Habitat and Protected Pollinator Patch programs, these programs are helping landowners evaluate and restore their properties to a native condition that will benefit our native birds, insects, and wildlife.

If neighbors, or entire communities, would come together to enhance backyards over many acres, the benefits would be enormous. The larger the tracts of restored habitat, the greater the benefit to our birds and other wildlife. Many of our nesting bird species require a minimal amount of suitable habitat to raise young successfully (i.e., Carolina Chickadees require about 4 acres during the breeding season).

This year's Ruth Ann Dean Memorial Birdathon will raise funds to help support the Habitat Stewardship Programs mentioned above. These crucial initiatives can significantly benefit our beleaguered bird populations by re-establishing robust native insect populations, as well as native vegetation producing seeds, nuts, and fruits for the benefit of all of our native wildlife.

## Advocacy

### Drinking Water From Plastic Bottles. Or Not.

*By Neal Barkus, Panhandle Progressive*

Here is the news my worldwide readers have been waiting for: the winners of the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Berkeley Springs International Water Tasting for 2020 are in! A panel of twelve judges sipped over 100 entrants at the competition. Believe it or not, the principal criterion for success was that the water should have no taste. Three of the top five winners in the bottled water category were Japanese. The best bottled water in the world is Hita no Homare Cosmo Water from Japan. Of course I am going to run right out and buy some. Or not.

A member of my household who shall remain nameless (I have been married to her for many years and I'm pretty sure she has a name) occasionally will bring home Fiji water in those cute little square bottles. I think Fiji water is refreshing. But then I saw that it is actually bottled on the island of Fiji, 7,726 miles from where I sit writing this. In order to get to a local grocery, Fiji water has to be shipped on ocean-going vessels that spew diesel smoke into the air and have to plow through an ocean of discarded plastic bottles just like the ones on board. To buy this stuff you'd have to be insane. I gently, respectfully, said just this to my beloved. What happened next is the interesting part.

Water is, of course, necessary for life. So when water comes

to us in packages of any kind, I think we need to be a little more tolerant than when some non-necessity is presented to us in single use plastic bags. Water in small plastic bottles can be just the thing when, for example, we are hiking away from a source of tap water. Water packaging has evolved into smaller, lighter containers. I grew up in Charleston, West Virginia and I can remember Tyler Mountain Water Company delivery trucks rolling through town with enormous green glass bottles on the back. This company is still going strong, mostly because in 1972 it began to package water in 8 oz. plastic bottles that are sold to coal companies for worker consumption.

Nevertheless, the bottled water industry is under assault, and with some justification. Part of this has to do with the source of the water. Water taken from natural springs or wells in unspoiled rural areas has big value from a marketing standpoint. What's more, U.S. bottled water sales reached 14 billion gallons in 2017. Environmentalists worry that extraction of natural groundwater from pristine mountain areas can lower the water table and deplete cold freshwater streams. The Washington State Senate recently passed a bill that would block new permits for taking water from natural sources. Similar measures are on top in California.

*continued next page*

*Plastic Bottles, or Not, continued from previous page*

Not all bottled water comes from natural springs and wells. One of the largest brands – Dasani – is a product of the Coca-Cola Company. It is bottled using “local water sources” that are subjected to a purification process called reverse osmosis. Then a special blend of minerals is added to give the water that “pure, crisp, fresh taste.” I guess Dasani is not interested in competing for the world title at Berkeley Springs. Dasani would not, however, trigger environmental opposition to tapping spring and well water as seen in Washington State. I noticed one other thing of interest on the Dasani website. The company recommends that consumers discard unopened bottles after one year.

This Dasani shelf life advice may simply be a quality concern. It may instead be a health concern. Dasani bottles contain no BPA and a new package called a Plant Bottle contains 30% plant material. Nevertheless, all plastic water bottles are suspected of shedding plastic microfibers and leaching chemicals into the water when stored at high temperatures. The bottled water industry denies this and argues that the studies raising this issue are not peer-reviewed and rest on unsound science. But the health implications of plastic water bottles bear watching.

Although plastic water bottles are fully recyclable, perhaps 40% are not recycled. The litter problem caused by plastic water bottles in National Parks caused the Obama Administration to ban them from the parks in 2011. This ban was lifted by the Trump Administration in 2017. The Administration’s statement lifting the ban noted that the ban had removed from 23 parks the healthiest beverage choice while still allowing sales of bottled sweetened drinks. But “fairness” was probably not the true motivation. The ban was lifted after the International Bottled Water Association spent hundreds of thousands of dollars lobbying for this result. But what happens with plastic bottles in the national parks is only a tiny fraction of the plastic litter problem created by these bottles.

So back to the domestic discussion of Fiji water with my beloved. No, I did not spend some quality time in the hospital. The result was that she stopped buying water in plastic bottles of any sort. This is a big change around here because I used to lug the 36-bottle cases into the house every week or so. We are using well water purified through a Brita filter. These filters can get clogged up pretty fast and have to be changed out, but the promotional material that accompanies them says that one filter replaces 300 standard 17 oz. water bottles. These filters reduce chlorine taste and eliminate zinc, copper, cadmium and mercury – but not lead. The Brita Company will recycle the spent plastic filters.

There is no perfect solution to the water packaging problem. We as a nation are drinking more water in plastic bottles and are not likely to change. Maybe the best that can be hoped for is a re-engineering of the composition of the bottles toward biodegradable materials, and an assurance in the meantime that plastic bottles have no unhealthful effects. Water filtering of well and tap water can also achieve a purity objective without any bottles at all. But don’t, whatever you do, even think about buying water bottled in Fiji or Japan.

## GIVE THE GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP!

ALL of your dues will stay here to support local PVAS efforts and help us grow! And here’s what you’ll get:

- 10% member discount on program fees, facility rentals, and birthday parties.
- A subscription to our bi-monthly newsletter, *Valley Views*, and twice monthly e-newsletter, *Heads Up, PVAS!*
- Free or reduced admission to participating nature centers/museums.
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### Gift Membership Form

To purchase a gift membership, send in the form below with an enclosed check. Dues are \$50/household, \$35/teacher (covering membership for everyone in your household for one year, or \$20/full-time adult student (benefits apply to member only). Make the check out to “PVAS.” For more details on membership, go to: [www.potomacaudubon.org/support/become-a-member/](http://www.potomacaudubon.org/support/become-a-member/).

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Please note if you’d like us to mail your gift membership directly to the recipient of your choice, or to you. If you’d like us to mail it directly to the recipient, also note when you would like it to be mailed.

### Clip and mail this form to:

Membership Chair, PVAS  
PO Box 578  
Shepherdstown, WV 25443



**Thank you for your support!**

### About the National Audubon Society

National Audubon has a membership program that is separate from PVAS. To become a National member, go to the Society’s website at [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org), and click on “join.” If you join National Audubon and reside in Berkeley, Jefferson, or Morgan counties in West Virginia, or in Washington County Maryland, you will automatically become an affiliate of PVAS, but not a full PVAS member. Affiliates will have access to our communications, and invitations to our events. However, all National Audubon dues go to the National Audubon Society and are not shared with PVAS. We heartily invite you to become a dues-paying member of both organizations.



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The Potomac Valley Audubon Society meets at 7:00 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May. Programs are free and open to the public. For additional information about PVAS or its programs and activities, please contact any of the board members listed here or see <http://www.potomacaudubon.org>. PVAS serves the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia and neighboring Washington County, Maryland.

## PVAS BOARD

PVAS Board meetings take place the first Thursday of every other month (September through June). Meetings are open to all PVAS members. Please contact the President or Vice President if you would like to attend.

*All Officers, Board Members, and Staff can be contacted at 681-252-1387.*

*PVAS Officers and Board Members (year of term expiration in parentheses)*

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Vice President:	Jim Cummins (2020)
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